

Carol Adkins

FOREWARD

In January of 2019, I was in a Bible study led by Theresa Rowe of Shaped by Faith. We were studying the book Discerning the Voice of God: How to Recognize when God Speaks by Priscila Shirer. At the same time, I had been reluctantly reading Miss Brenda and the Loveladies by Brenda Spahn and Irene Zutell. As Co-Founder of Fresh Start for Women, a non-profit that provides transitional housing for women in recovery from addictions, I did not like to read about the struggles the authors encountered as they launched a similar ministry. One morning I put my hand on the cover of the Loveladies book and said out loud, "God let me get out of this book what You want me to get and what co-founder, Cindy Jean, wants me to get" and headed out to the book study. About a mile from my home, I hear, "Write a book." I knew that had to be a God thought as I rarely read books and surely never had any intention of writing one. Maybe the title will be A Fresh Start with a New Heart.

In April 2021 while attending a women's leadership conference, three women prayed for me declaring, "Your artistic, creative abilities will be utilized by God." I laughed, then cried, and said, "I won't discount what God says but I've said so many times that I'm not artistic or creative. I can't even draw stick people." The next day at church, they announce the formation of a new group Arts Collective. I went to the gathering with the intention of blessing the young leader and the group. However, God intended for me to launch this book and embrace the creative talents He had given me.

CHAPTER ONE Covenant ID *Psalm 19:5 ...like a champion rejoicing to run his course.*

Finish strong! That is the goal. Like the thief on the cross, it is NEVER too late.

Fresh Start for Women, Inc. began as a dream, a vision, a longing to help those battling substance abuse or addiction to destructive lifestyles. Co-founder Cindy Jean knew the terror, the torment, the anguish, the trauma of dysfunctional behaviors. At the age of 18, she entered the first of many rehabs.

Where do the women go? Who cares? Jobless, penniless, broken, used, unloved, the adjectives could fill this page, but God writes on a clean page "Here is the story I wrote about you when I first thought about Cynthia. She is tenacious, unrelenting, determined, self-disciplined, a God chaser and a people rescuer. She will speak truth and cut through the deception."

Satan must have heard the song being sung over her about a mighty warrior bride and he set out to kill her, steal her destiny, and destroy her reputation. By the age of 40 he had nearly accomplished the task. Rehabs for drug addiction, mental hospitals, the trauma of finding her father on the floor dead from suicide relived again when her husband shot himself after a wild police chase. She screams, "NO....." as she attempted to hold him one last time while fighting off the cops.

IV drug use, using a 5-gallon bucket as a toilet with no heat or running water, and 2 small children running around. The mental anguish of watching her husband commit suicide, subsequent loss of her 2 children, big houses, boats, a job, everything was ripped apart. The life of luxury came to a screeching halt. Life wasn't worth fighting for. Men, men and more men, drugs, life in the madness came face to face with the Creator.

Cindy often had no food or gas for her vehicle. Finding work at a car dealership and trying to manage her addiction, she still had great difficulty finding a place to live as her poor credit history kept people from renting to her. She was desperate and said, "God, if you are real, have someone invite me to church." That was the invitation Jesus needed. Within days, a co-worker, a very unlikely "church lady" with a skirt and a bun, invited her to church. Things began to change.

The battle for her soul was on in epic proportions. Mal-nourished, hair dyed a crazy color, dirty nails, and an attitude were no match for the never ending, never ending reckless love of God. He provided a company car, gas, and groceries seemingly out of the blue. Cindy, too proud to ask for help, but help came anyway. Godly women surrounded her and gradually broke off the chips and rough edges. The original design was being unveiled. Podcasts, Bible studies, women's conferences...transformation had begun. She became able to walk out the humility of Christ like no other. That is how Jesus was transforming Cindy. The Lord was molding her to the point that one weekend she was assisting her ex-husband's ex-wife, who was in a back brace with a fractured spine, shower so the woman's children (that were legally nothing to Cindy) could go to church with her.

Financial miracles followed her. The word spoken over her during prayer about getting \$100,000 came to fruition when in October 2018, Impact 100 Owensboro awarded that exact amount to Fresh Start for Women.

Just as in the story of Joseph in Genesis 50:20, what the enemy means for destruction, God can use it for your good and His glory. So, the pandemic of 2020 with what became an evil thought to me COVID-19, got renamed during a women's conference in April 2021. COVID-19 Covenant ID Psalm 19. When the cares of this world begin to consume my thinking and there seems to be no answer or change in the crazy things happening around us, this Psalm puts my thoughts into perspective. ***Psalm 19:1 The heavens declare the glory of God and verse 5 the sun...like a champion rejoicing to run his course.*** Just one look at the moon, especially a full moon, speaks volumes to my soul (mind, will and emotions). There is no way the galaxies evolved from nothingness. There is way too much order and connection. The moon's orbit and influence on the tides, the sun's light, warming, and photosynthesis; those all point to a Creator. Plants take in the carbon dioxide we do not need and release the life-giving oxygen that we do need. Creation nourishes our body, soul, and spirit.

I am who YOU say I am. What does God say about the people He created? The first chapter of Genesis tells us we are made in His image and that all that He made was VERY good. Everything

He created has purpose. In Romans chapter 12, is a list of 7 “gifts,” characteristics that God gives to every created person. We choose whether we use them for His glory or whether they get perverted and take us down the path of destruction and often self-destruction. Leadership is a perfect example. While teaching a group of women in the jail, I told a young lady that I saw leadership qualities in her. She quickly and forcefully yanked up her tattered, long underwear sleeve she wore under her green uniform and said, “You’re right. These are gang tattoos. I lead a gang.” This is the story pattern of women, men, and children all over the planet. God gives each of us unique gifts and talents and it is up to us to use them wisely. So often, trauma, verbal or physical abuse, rejection or a myriad of negative influences attempts to take us from our original purpose of reflecting the nature and character of our Creator. God made a covenant with His people, and we are to declare the glory of God just as the heavens do.

So, what is your passion? What excites you? What gives you life? Discovering our spiritual DNA, God given gifts and not comparing ourselves to others and NOT BELITTLEING people who are different than we are, and instead encourage and support one another calling out and encouraging leadership, mercy, servanthood, giving, encouraging, leading, or prophesying. That last gift trips people up but when we look at how the enemy perverts it—fortunetelling or mediums, we can begin to see how the original intent was for people to seek God and His perspective about situations and speak truth and life.

Like the women who unconditionally loved Cindy, we all have a role in bringing together the infinite facets of an infinite God. There are hundreds of Cindys we each encounter in our lifetime and a simple smile, or an encouraging word can transform a life. The guidelines God has set for people to follow are not designed to limit us from having a life full of joy, excitement, and pleasure. On the contrary, if followed, Psalm 19:8 tells us *they are radiant, giving light to the eyes*. Let’s join together and pull people up from depression and devastation into a fulfilled life with the goal of **finishing like a champion** with eternal rewards.

Illustrations by Emily Burden



